

Pinkerton, William

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William A. Pinkerton,
Western Manager Pinkerton's National Detective Agency,
Headquarters, 201 Fifth Ave., Chicago, Illinois

Born Dundee, Kane County, Illinois; is now in his 54th year and is the eldest son of Allan Pinkerton, who founded the Agency at Chicago in 1850.

At the breaking out of the Civil War Wm. Pinkerton was a student in the Notre Dame University, Notre Dame, Ind., and although then only 16 years of age volunteered. His father, Allan Pinkerton, having at this time been summoned by President Lincoln to organize an Army Secret Service, arranged for his son's discharge and took him with him into the Secret Service he was forming for the Army of the Potomac. Wm. Pinkerton remained with his father in this service until General McClellan was relieved of his command, when Allan Pinkerton, who although a Republican in politics was a great admirer of General McClellan, and believing that General McClellan had been misunderstood and not treated as he should, left the service. William Pinkerton then returned to Chicago where he entered Bryant & Stratton's Business College, from which he graduated and again re-entered the detective service of his father.

Allan Pinkerton in 1865 established a New York branch, and William went to New York as an Assistant Manager; in 1867 returning to Chicago on account of his father's failing health and there filled the position of Assistant Manager until 1884 when his father died. William and his brother Robert then became the proprietors of the Pinkerton National Detective Agency, William with headquarters at Chicago managing all of their agencies west of Chicago, while Robert looked after the Eastern Agencies with headquarters in New York City.

William Pinkerton aided his father in breaking up the Reno band of train robbers, who previous to 1869 made their headquarters near Seymour, Indiana.

This gang had terrorized Jackson and adjoining counties in Southern Indiana where it became unsafe for express companies to transfer money by train at night. The Adams Express Company instructed Allan Pinkerton to assist the local Authorities and as a result the band was broken up and scattered, some of the band fleeing to Canada from where they were afterwards extradited and returned to Indiana for trial. So outraged were the people at the crimes of this band that they formed a Vigilance Committee, who took the various prisoners from jails where they were confined, even breaking into the New Albany Indiana jail to get some of them who had been placed there for safe keeping.

Before the Vigilance Committee had disbanded they had executed 12 members of the Reno Brothers band, and driven from the county over 50 different families who had aided or sympathized with these outlaws in their long career of crime.

William A. Pinkerton is one of the best known detectives in the United States, more especially west and south west of Chicago, which territory he has travelled over for many years; in certain sections by the water-ways, on horse back and by stage coaches long before they were traversed by railroads. Today he is almost constantly travelling between Chicago and the Pacific coast, visiting the various offices under his control, and probably travels more by rail than any other detective of the United States.

From 1870 to 1873 he was engaged almost constantly in Northeastern Texas, Western Arkansas, Western Missouri, Western Tennessee and other portions of the South representing the Southern Express Co. in running down various bands of train robbers, then operating on the line of that express company.

He had charge of breaking up the train robbing gang headed by the Farrington Brothers, who operated in Western Tennessee, holding up trains on the Mobile & Ohio road.

Hillary Farrington, one of the brothers, was in his custody on a Mississippi steamer being conveyed from Cairo, Ills. to Columbus, Ky. en route to Union City, Tenn., where his crime had been committed, when attempting to escape he flung himself off the boat, was struck by a paddle wheel and was killed.

In February, 1873 Mr. Pinkerton visited Europe following up the men who had robbed the Third National Bank of Baltimore, Md. He located them in London, but as they could not be extradited under the treaty as it then existed, he was obliged to return without them. In London in company of Inspector John Shore, afterwards Superintendent of the New Scotland Detective force, he accidentally ran into Austin Byron Bidwell and George McDonnell in a fashionable tailor shop. He knew these men in the United States as dangerous professional forgers, pointed them out to Inspector Shore, and advised him of their history, and told him they would bear watching, as they were undoubtedly here on some scheme of forgery. With Inspector Shore he also called on the Solicitors of the Bank of England and told them of these men being in England.

While Mr. Pinkerton was returning to America in April, 1872 came the exposure of the Million Dollar forgery on the Bank of England. On his arrival in the United States he cabled his friend, Inspector Shore of his suspicions that Austin Byron Bidwell and McDonnell were connected with that crime. This was one of the first clues that led up to determining who committed this great forgery. Mr. Pinkerton afterwards arrested Austin Byron Bidwell in Havana, recovering a large amount of his share of the forgery. George McDonnell, the actual forger in the case, was arrested in New York by detectives from Headquarters. George Bidwell was arrested in Scotland on information furnished by Robt. Pinkerton from New York, and Edwin Noyes Hills was arrested in London at the time of the discovery of the forgery.

In 1875 two 'hold ups', Ed. Johnson and Matthew Morris, alias 'Pittsburgh Matt' and an outlaw negro held up and robbed a messenger of the Southern Express Co. in Memphis, Tenn. obtaining about \$20,000. Mr. Pinkerton traced 'Pittsburgh Matt' into Northeastern Texas, hundreds of miles from the line of the railroads and surprised him at night in a 'shack' while he was asleep, arrested him and recovered nearly all his share of the money. He afterwards located Ed. Johnson and his negro accomplice near Cape Girardeau, Mo. and succeeded in arresting them. Johnson and 'Pittsburgh Matt' were tried, convicted and sentenced to 20 years each in the Tennessee State Prison and the negro to ten years.

On the night of March 12th, 1886 Kellogg Nichols, Messenger of the United States Express Company, was 'held up' and killed on the Chicago and Rock Island Railroad, and the United States Express Co. robbed of \$25,000. William Pinkerton took up the investigation, caused the arrest of Henry Schwartz, a brakeman and Newton Watt, a baggageman of the train. They were tried, convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment, Watt dying in prison and Schwartz after serving 12 years was pardoned during 1898 by Governor Atgerld of Illinois.

On September 15th, 1893 occurred the robbery of the American Express Company on the Mineral Range Railroad when \$75,000 was stolen.

Mr. Pinkerton immediately left Chicago with the General Manager of the Express Company and took charge of the case. With the aid of the local authorities he arrested all of the thieves, and recovered all the money stolen.

For a great many years he has been credited with being one of the best posted detectives on professional criminals in the United States. He has a wonderful memory, and very rarely forgets a name a face or a place.

In the western country for the past thirty years there has scarcely been a crime committed on a railroad company, an express company, bank or large jewelry store that he has not had some interest in, but space will not permit the detailing of these and the innumerable important arrests he has made or assisted in.

His last success was in the recovery and the restoration to the owners, Messrs. Agnew & Sons of London of the renowned Gainsborough painting of the Duchess of Devonshire, which was stolen by American thieves in 1876, and which has just been purchased by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan for \$180,000. One strange fact connected with this robbery is that one of the thieves whom Mr. Pinkerton followed to Europe

in 1873 for the robbery of the Third National Bank, Baltimore, Md. was the party who in 1876 cut this picture from its frame and retained it under his control for 25 years.

Mr. Pinkerton is very fond of horses and dogs, and has a fine kennel of the different species of house dogs.

He engaged for a time in horse racing, but on account of the pressures of other business was obliged to abandon it. Among the horses he has owned was 'Fudge Denny' who has won some of the largest stakes in California.

Mr. Pinkerton is a member of the Chicago Athletic Club, and a member of the Knights of Pythias.

He has a personal acquaintance with nearly every prominent police official in the United States.

It has always been the policy of the Messrs. Pinkertons to work in harmony with the various police departments, and the benefits from this have been mutual.